

“Shallow men believe in luck...Strong men believe in cause and effect.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

(from “Worship,” *The Conduct of Life*, 1860)

Around our house when difficult circumstances present themselves, it wouldn't be unusual to hear, “Things happen for a reason.” I know that my kids are tired of hearing those words. One year my youngest daughter, for her birthday, asked that she not have to hear that phrase for an entire day. I was happy to accommodate her – for a day.

For the most part, I believe that the saying, “Things happen for a reason” has been unfairly relegated to some unseemly list of trite, overworked, meaningless phrases – ones that adults use when they can't come up with a reason for a particular outcome. But it is really a much more powerful statement. As Emerson suggests above, it's all about cause and effect. Simply put, there are consequences for our actions. And usually, they are appropriate.

When we honestly examine the happenings in our daily lives, and try to remain objective, more often than not, we have to admit that most outcomes are logical in nature. Things *did* happen for a reason. We may not have liked the reasoning. We may have a hard time accepting it, but if we think through an event in a methodical fashion, we can see why something occurred the way it did. And luck had nothing to do with it.

There...we've said it. That dreaded word – luck. Or more aptly put, the reason behind everyone else's good fortune. When good things happen to rivals, we call it luck. When good things happen to friends, we still call it luck. When are we willing to admit that someone actually deserved a promotion, or a prize, or whatever else they happened to earn? I'm not suggesting that we are never happy to see someone else succeed, but when was the last time you watched a news story about someone winning a multi-state lottery, and didn't use the word *luck*? Didn't they actually earn it? Didn't they have to purchase a ticket in order to be eligible? By doing so, they put themselves in a position to win. Sure, the odds were against them – terribly so. But by buying the ticket, they earned the opportunity to succeed. It may have been a million-to-one shot, or more likely several million-to-one shot. For this argument, the odds don't matter – only the rules. Buy a ticket – earn a chance to win. In the lottery, as in life, you can't win if you don't play.

Now please don't think I am advocating that you throw away your hard-earned dollars on lottery tickets. But isn't Emerson talking to both winners and losers when he says, “Strong men believe in cause and effect.” If you buy a ticket, based on the odds, you are likely to lose. Cause and effect. If you buy a ticket, regardless of the odds, someone has to win, and that could just as easily be you as anyone else. Cause and effect. If you play and lose, you deserve it – because of the long odds. If you play and win, you deserve it – because you followed the rules – and because someone must win.

We've beaten the lottery analogy to death. The point is this – we tend to attribute luck to someone's good fortune not to some skill they possess. If we examine the circumstances, we can make a pretty good case that lucky people prepared themselves for the moment, and gave themselves an opportunity to succeed. Is that luck or is that foresight? Let's give the other guy a little credit.

If you aced a test, received a promotion, or were presented with an award, and you happened to overhear someone say “Why can't I get lucky like that?” you know it would bother you. The individual who

makes a statement like that seems to be dismissing your talents, and is attributing your windfall to luck. But it wasn't luck. Because there is no such thing as luck.

There is only cause and effect. And although we may not want to hear it – things do happen for a reason.